Nursing Assessment Protocols

724.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish standards for evaluating and treating inmates with medical issues that are easily and effectively treated or triaged by nursing personnel who have been properly trained in the use of nursing assessment protocols.

724.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Nursing assessment protocols - Written instructions or guidelines that specify the steps to be taken in evaluating an inmate's health status and providing medical treatment. Protocols may include first-aid procedures for the identification and care of ailments that ordinarily would be treated with over-the-counter (OTC) medication or through self-care. These protocols also may address more serious symptoms, such as chest pain, shortness of breath or intoxication. The protocols provide a sequence of steps to evaluate and stabilize an inmate until a qualified health care professional is contacted and orders for further care are received.

724.2 POLICY

It is the policy of this office that medical care performed by personnel other than a physician shall be performed pursuant to a written protocol or order of the contract medical provider..

724.3 PROTOCOL DEVELOPMENT AND AUTHORIZATION

The facility's contract medical provider or the authorized designee shall develop, review and authorize all nursing protocols used for the treatment of inmates, and shall develop, deliver or procure appropriate training for the nurses on their use. Each nursing assessment protocol will have a signed declaration indicating it has been reviewed and approved by the nursing administrator and the contract medical provider.

The protocols developed shall be appropriate for the training and experience of the health care services staff members who will deliver the services. Each protocol shall comply with the standards of practice for the level of care the health care services staff members are authorized to provide. The protocols shall only include the use of OTC medications.

The contract medical provider. shall review the nursing assessment protocols annually, revising as necessary and dating and signing approved protocols.

724.4 TRAINING

Nurses will be trained and approved in the nursing assessment protocols prior to their use. The training shall be documented and should include:

(a) Evidence that new nurses have been trained.

(b) Demonstration of knowledge and skills.

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(c) Evidence of annual review of skills.

(d) Evidence of retraining when protocols are introduced or revised.

724.5 AUTHORIZED USE OF PROTOCOLS

Nursing staff may use a nursing assessment protocol only after they have been trained and authorized by the contract medical provider. Nursing assessment protocols shall only be used after a nurse fully evaluates the inmate's complaint and the inmate's condition meets the appropriate criteria.

Inmates may only be treated using a nursing protocol for the same condition on two consecutive visits. If the inmate requests service for the same condition a third time, the inmate should be referred to a physician's assistant, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, or physician.

The assessment protocols only include the use of OTC medication. When OTCs are administered per the protocol, they do not require the signature of a physician. However, the order and the administration of the medication shall be documented on the medication administration record.

A registered nurse (RN) is considered the minimum certification level required to independently initiate medical treatment. The RN must be present to physically assess the inmate; an assessment cannot be done via telephone or electronically.

A licensed vocational nurse (LVN) is generally prohibited from independently initiating any standardized protocol. Under very specific circumstances (e.g., early detoxification, history of a seizure disorder), it may be acceptable for an LVN to initiate a standing order following a telephone consultation with a physician, physician's assistant, psychiatrist, dentist, or another person who meets the minimum certification level to initiate such orders. Under these circumstances, it is essential that the inmate be personally evaluated within 24 hours by a physician's assistant, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, or physician.

Nursing assessment protocols shall not include the administration of any prescription medication, with the exception of protocols addressing an emergency or a life-threatening situation. Treatment with prescription medication may only be initiated upon a written or verbal order from the contract medical provider, psychiatrist, dentist or other people who is licensed to dispense medication in the state, either independently or under the supervision of a physician.

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